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ABSTRACT

Based on the diary of Mary Moody Emerson (1771-1863), which was discovered in the Houghton Library at Harvard University among the Emerson family papers, as well as on hundreds of her letters and other records, the lives of five generations of women within the Emerson ministerial dynasty are recovered, and their religious and family experiences are reconstructed. The first of the papers four parts details the diary's discovery and its history and outlines the methodology for the examination process. In part 2, the women's spirituality is considered through the viewing of such visual objects as gravestones, portraits, household furnishings, and emblematic keepsakes. The religious influence of the Emerson patriarchs on the women's spirituality is traced through sermons, journals, and church and public records written by the male family members. Women's sphere in the home is the focus of part 3. To recreate each of the women's social roles; the location of individual homes to the church; roles in the kitchen, in marriage, and as mothers are examined through the same visual objects used in part 2. Part 4 is a biography of Mary's life constructed within the religious and family traditions found in parts 2 and 3. A genealogy of the Emerson family and 14 pages of photographs are included. (DJC)

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I

One major goal of women's studies scholarship is the recovery of lost women's texts and the recognition of a women's tradition in literature. I have had a wonderfully direct experience of this work: several years ago I found the thousand-page, fifty-three year long diary or "Almanack" of Mary Moody Emerson. Quickly I discovered that this was a major text, in its span of the years 1802 to 1855 the longest extant spiritual diary by any American woman before the mid-nineteenth century. I started thinking about women's diaries as religious expression, soon realizing that I was not alone in considering religious experience as central to women historically, both intrinsically and as foundation for later literary and political achievements.[1]

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[1]I have done this work in two extraordinary settings, the Mellon Seminar at the Wellesley Center for Research on Women in 1982-83 and the Women's Studies in Religion Program at Harvard Divinity School in 1984-85. I am indebted to Peggy McIntosh, Nancy Crumbine, and Mary Johnson for ideas first heard in the Wellesley seminar, and to Connie Buchanan, Clarissa Atkinson, and Margaret Miles at Harvard. Three research assistants have helped at various times with the digging--Katharine Stanis and Anne Brennan through the sponsorship of the Wellesley Center, Laurie Ledeen through her own generosity. And particular thanks are due to the Ellis Phillips Foundation, which extended my Harvard fellowship through the fall of 1985 and gave me the opportunity to present the material of this paper as a lecture.

On diaries as literature, see Teaching Women's Literature from a Regional Perspective, ed. Leonore Hoffmann and Deborah Rosenfelt (New York, M. L. A., 1982) and A Day at a Time: The Diary Literature of American Women from 1764 to the Present, ed.

But I did not find Mary Moody Emerson's diary because I was originally interested in women's diaries. Indeed if I had started that way I would not have found it; it was not listed in any bibliography of women's manuscripts. Instead it was in the Emerson Family Papers at Houghton Library, uncatalogued and believed lost. And I was at Houghton researching the Emerson Family, the family that is of Ralph Waldo Emerson, in which my diarist was always referred to by her family role, as "Aunt Mary."[2] Women's words--women--are not of course to be found only in a tradition of their own, but also in the families of men. At the same time I was beginning this work on Mary Emerson's diary, for instance, Carol Karlsen and Laurie Crumpacker were editing the diary of Esther Edwards Burr, daughter of Jonathan

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Margo Culley (New York: Feminist Press, 1985.) Bibliographies of American diaries include Culley; William Matthews, American Diaries: An Annotated Bibliography (Boston: Canner, 1959) and American Diaries in Manuscript, 1580-1954: A Descriptive Bibliography (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1974); and Andrea Hinding et al., eds, Women's History Sources: A Guide to Archive and Manuscript Sources in the United States (New York and London: R. R. Bowker, 1979.)

Major attempts to place American women's religious experience historically include Nancy Cott, The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Anne Douglas, The Feminization of American Culture (New York: Knopf, 1977); Amanda Porterfield, Feminine Spirituality in America: From Sarah Edwards to Martha Graham (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980); Barbara Epstein, The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth Century America (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1981); Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982). An important collection of source materials is the three-volume series edited by Rosemary Ruether and Rosemary Keller, Women and Religion in America (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981, 1983, 1985.)

[2]Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay on his aunt and her private writing is included in his Complete Works, ed. Edward Waldo Emerson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1903-04), X, 371-404.

Edwards, which with uncanny similarity they found in the Edwards Family Papers at Yale.[3]

But I call these the "families of men" only with some irony. Of course both the Edwards and the Emerson papers are preserved at major universities because of the fame and cultural authority of a single male member in each family. But families are by definition, demographically speaking, at least half women. Within patriarchal history is a history of women. Not only are the family papers of famous men a place where women's texts might be found; also the family is an organizing concept that brings together male and female, public and private, famous and unknown human lives. Having found Mary Emerson's diary and also read hundreds of letters by her, I realized that I did not want now simply to abandon my interest in the Emerson family, but reorganize it with Mary and her private writing in the center.

Mary stands at the center of the Emerson Family Papers in more than one way. First, chronologically. These papers amount to five generations of a New England ministerial dynasty; Mary, who lived for eighty-nine years from 1774 to 1863, is in the middle of the five generations and knew representatives of all of them in person. As a small child she was raised by the grandmother for whom she was named, Mary Moody Emerson; as an adolescent she returned to her mother's house and attended the

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[3]Carol F. Karlsen and Laurie Crumpacker, eds., The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-57 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984). Yet another recent example is the diary of Mary Fish Noyes Silliman, part of the Silliman Papers at Yale and the basis for Joy Day Buel and Richard Buel, Jr.'s book The Way of Duty: A Woman and Her Family in Revolutionary America (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1984).

deathbed of her other grandmother, Phebe Bliss. She introduced her brother William to his wife, Ruth Haskins; and after William's death played a crucial step-fatherly role in raising her nephews, including Ralph Waldo Emerson. (See enclosed genealogical chart.) Finally in 1861, in advanced old age, Mary regaled Waldo's daughter Ellen with stories of their mutual ancestors, stories that fortunately Ellen wrote down; Mary also gave Ellen all of her diary manuscripts--that is how they ended up in the Emerson Family Papers at all.[4]

My story of Mary and Ellen already suggests the second reason why Mary stands at the center: this single woman quite self-consciously served as family historian, not only telling oral tales of the forebears she knew, but also passing on inherited oral tales. The "Stories of Our Ancestors" that Ellen wrote down in 1861, then, go all the way back to the lives of Ellen's great-great-great grand-parents the Moodies, born in the late seventeenth century.

Third, Mary stands in the center ideologically, that is as the hinge between her clerical ancestors' Puritan piety and the neo-Puritan individualism that her nephew Waldo made famous, commonly called Transcendentalism. Waldo, abandoning the ministry

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[4]The Letters of Ellen Tucker Emerson, ed. Edith E. W. Gregg (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press), I, 222-26; Ellen Emerson, "What I Can Remember of Stories of Our Ancestors Told Me by Aunt Mary Moody Emerson" (ms. Emerson Family Papers, Houghton Library. All mss. not otherwise noted are from the same collection, cited with permission of Houghton and the Ralph Waldo Emerson Memorial Association.)

to which he was by family tradition trained, preached "Self-Reliance" from the secular pulpit of lecture and essay; in fact he urged an abandonment of "the fathers" for revelation by insight in the present. Mary, a full generation earlier, identified as much as possible with her ministerial fathers' authority; as a woman, she was in no position to repudiate the pulpit. But she too found her power in solitude. "Were the genius of the Christian religion painted," Mary wrote in 1804, "her form would be full of majesty, her mien solemn, her aspect benign, and strongly impressed with joy & hope, her eyes raised to heaven with tears for Zion and rays of glory descending to illuminate the earth at her entreaties."[5]

My concern here, though, is not the relationship between Mary and Waldo, but rather Mary in relation to the family and religious culture that preceded her. How did Mary, a single woman of thirty in 1804, imagine that the genius of Christianity should be "painted" as a female emblem, emblem of solitary and prophetic power? In answering this question, Waldo still proves to be a valuable resource. For despite that high rhetoric of Self-Reliance, Waldo thought often of his Puritan ancestors, about whom he heard directly from Aunt Mary. He himself recorded Mary's words, her oral tales.

This aunt, he wrote in his journal in 1837, had saved him from the "levitical education" of Harvard by raining on him "influences of ancestral religion." "The depth of the religious sentiment which I knew in my Aunt Mary imbuing all her genius & derived to her from such hoarded family traditions, from so many

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[5]"Almanacks," Nov. 8, [1804].

godly lives & godly deaths of sainted kindred at Concord, Malden, and York, was itself a culture, an education." Waldo goes on to recount tales of these sainted, ministerial ancestors, then returns to the laywoman who told them to him. "In my childhood Aunt Mary herself wrote the prayers which first my brother William and when he went to college I read aloud morning and evening at the family devotions, and they still sound in my ear with their prophetic and apocalyptic ejaculations. Religion was her occupation, and when years after, I came to write sermons for my own church I could not find any examples or treasuries of piety so high-toned, so profound, or promising such rich influences as my remembrances of her conversations and letters."[6]

This is a remarkable tribute by the male founder of the American literary tradition to the lay, self-educated female imagination. And so is it a central text for my study of the five-generation Emerson family, especially in its suggestion that family can provide "a culture, and education" as well as physical nurture. Following it back offers a genuinely new sense of Ralph Waldo Emerson's connection to New England's religious past. I have read nearly all the available sermons and journals and public records of these male ancestors in Concord, Malden, York; and I have found them all to be New Light, conversion-seeking preachers, all of them public supporters of George Whitefield's Awakening in the 1740's and subscribers to the theological works of Jonathan Edwards. Usually Emersonian Transcendentalism is read against the

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[6]The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. William lH. Gilman et al., (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960-82), V, 323-4.

backdrop of Old Light, Unitarian Harvard. In the Emerson family itself may be found that elusive continuity "From Edwards to Emerson" that so many scholars since Perry Miller have sought. And it can be found only if the family is construed in two-gender terms, not as a succession of fathers and sons.[7]

But to say this only sharpens the question: how can we reconstruct the experience of women in the Emerson family as a New England, pro-Awakening clerical dynasty? Waldo's tribute to Mary Moody Emerson is embedded in a remarkably, literally patriarchal sense of his own ancestral family. There is only one woman in it, and she is neither source nor end of the piety that she embodies. Religion is "derived to her" from family traditions, "hoarded" and passed on as a fruitful rain upon the soul of Ralph Waldo Emerson. All the ancestors about whom Waldo remembers stories are men, clergymen, and the stories all concern either their authority with parishioners or their devout facing of death, never their relationship with wives or children. How Mary knew these stories, how she as a woman took religion as her "occupation" and prayed her "prophetic and apocalyptic ejaculations"--these are not questions that concern him. But they must concern us. For this lineage quite simply makes no sense without inquiring into the lives of women who preceded Mary. As I have said, she was raised

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[7]Perry Miller, "From Edwards to Emerson," in Errand into the Wilderness (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), pp. 184-203. Cf. Phyllis Cole, "The Advantage of Loneliness: Mary Moody Emerson's Almanacks, 1802-1855," in Emerson: Prospect and Retrospect (Harvard English Studies 10), ed. Joel Porte (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 1-32; and "From the Edwardses to the Emersons," CEA Critic, forthcoming 1986.

by them; she knew the ministers of Concord, Malden, and York only through stories by their widows and daughters.

And so we need to turn from Waldo's memory of Mary's stories to the closer rendering of them as told to another woman, to his daughter Ellen Emerson in 1861. Not one of the dozen stories in Ellen's transcript overlaps with the four that Waldo recalled in his journal passages. And every single one is essentially about women and children, the wives and offspring of the sainted clergymen in Waldo's stories. Clearly, if Mary could idealize her clerical ancestors to would-be clerical nephews, she also participated in a more woman-centered lineage as well, one she could share with her grand-niece Ellen more easily than with Waldo. I began by opposing the possibility of reading Mary's diary in a woman's literary tradition with the possibility of reading it in family context. But within family lineage, even one defined by the male profession of Protestant ministry, is a woman's tradition too. Mary's stories point us toward such a historical reality, and this itself becomes at least as significant as the reality of Mary's female influence on a male literary giant.

Following the direction that Mary points, however, takes us off the edge of language, takes us out of Houghton reading room and the Emerson Family Papers into Maine and Massachusetts towns. For the generations previous to Mary's own, the Houghton collection includes precisely two texts by women, two one-page

letters.[8] But other kinds of evidence are available. The Emerson men's sermons and diaries reveal in fragmentary form the lives of women in family and church; some church records survive to tell of conversions and covenants, even a ministerial widow's petitions to get paid; town records reveal cycles of birth and reproduction, death and taxes. These are the resources of social historians, and they are invaluable to the reconstruction of women's lives, where the written record often falls silent.

But the greatest resource, at least in the case of a New England ministerial family, is visual evidence. Gravestones, houses, furnishings, emblematic keepsakes--these can be found and "read" as texts too.[9] We can discover women in their "household stuff"--that wonderful phrase commonly used to describe women's inheritance in colonial wills. William Emerson of Concord, Mary's father, used it in his diary at the moment in 1767 when he and his new wife Phebe "divided into two families" within his mother-in-law's house. "Divided up the household Stuff and furniture," he records. Three years later he and Phebe built their own Concord parsonage and took what they inherited from Mrs. Bliss along with them. This was the house from which William rode off to become a chaplain in the Revolution; he died almost immediately of dysentery, and a legal inventory in the fall of

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[8] The letters are from Phebe Walker Bliss to Phebe Bliss Emerson Ripley (Mary's grandmother to her mother), August 26, 1762; and from Elizabeth Emerson Edwards to Joseph Emerson (Mary's great-aunt to her grandfather), c. 1766.

[9] On the "language" of physical artifacts see Henry Glassie, "The Artifact's Place in American Studies," Prospects 3 (1978), esp. 33-37; and John Demos, "Words and Things," William and Mary Quarterly 40 (1978), 584-97.

1776 records exactly what "stuff" he left to his young widow.[10] We can see a remarkable number of these actual possessions today, for his widow's house is the famous Old Manse, so named by Nathaniel Hawthorne but in fact, as the sign in front proclaims, the residence of "Mrs. William Emerson and her descendants" for one hundred and sixty nine years before and after Hawthorne's three years there.

The excitement of reconstructing a family history of this sort is its position between intellectual and social history, verbal discourse and the mute realities of fact and artifact. Material culture studies, as John Demos comments, generally lack a layer of anecdote; when we are given the chance actually to see or touch some "physical chunk" of the past, "imagination goes limp." We easily leave the physical residua of the past to antiquarians, who preserve and admire them but never ("in our sense") understand them.[11] I would add that historians of women have no such luxury: attempting to recover silent lives means resorting to silent evidence. But I in fact have both artifacts and anecdotes here, especially the anecdotes of Mary Moody Emerson; and it is the mutual illumination of words and things that especially interests me.

Mary's verbal recollections in fact often focused on meaningful objects. "That porringer you have," she told Ellen, "belonged to [my grandparents.] E [over] J & M on the handle, means Joseph and Mary Emerson. My grandmother left it to me for

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[10] Diaries and Letters of William Emerson, ed. Amelia Forbes Emerson (Boston: privately printed, 1972), pp. 33, 127-29.
[11] "Words and Things," pp. 584-85.

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my name, and I sold it to your grandfather, my brother, for old silver. Tell your Mother that the moment when she offered to give it back to me, was the moment of the most unalloyed happiness in my life! But you destroyed it before sixty seconds were over. 'No, no,' you said, 'only to keep while she stays in Concord.' It was the Upham blood in you. That is covetous blood. Your Mother brought a more generous vein in the family. I hope the other children hold it from her." There's the whole five generations capsulized in one object and one splenetic bit of conversation.[12]

In a letter to her sister Ellen told how Mary delivered these stories: carefully groomed and dressed all in black, bringing down pictures and daguerreotypes as she talked, anxious lest Ellen catch cold in the draft, for, Ellen tells Edith, "Aunt pleases herself with regarding me as more tender than the True Princess." Mary proceeded to give Ellen the diary manuscripts in a special chest. And from the niece with whom Mary was living, a granddaughter of William and Phebe Emerson, Ellen received "a curious little old-fashioned worked case" containing William's letters to Phebe. According to the story the niece heard from her mother, Phebe would take out and cry over these letters after William's death and her own remarriage to Ezra Ripley.[13] All these manuscripts and a few of the pictures are now part of the Emerson Family Papers. But not, of course, the chest, the worked case, or the tears. Attempting to recover women's ways of remembering and sustaining the past, we need to conjure these up.

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[12]"Stories of Our Ancestors," p. 1.
[13]Letters of Ellen Tucker Emerson, I, 222-24.

II

So I would like to describe a few visual objects pertaining to Mary's female elders, interspersing them with verbal evidence, before making any conclusions about the two-gender Emerson religious tradition as Mary knew it. I am not going to recount a particularized inter-generational history, but emphasize the shared experience of these elders, all ministers' wives and daughters: Hannah Moody in York, the elder Mary Moody Emerson in Malden, Phebe Bliss in Concord, Phebe Bliss Emerson Ripley in Concord. The first three were all wives of New Light ministers within the Standing Order, contemporary to Edwards and the First Great Awakening; the last was a daughter of this generation and wife of two Concord ministers in succession, during and after the Revolution. I want to consider both these women's spirituality and their social roles.

But first a warning. Approaching spirituality through visual objects involves a special difficulty with New England Protestantism. What we do not have in this tradition is iconography, any directly representational or symbolic art as a center of devotional activity. Margaret Miles' recent study of medieval and Renaissance Catholic art as a focus of women's devotion cannot be paralleled for the Puritan tradition. Miles in fact points to the reason why: Protestantism, and certainly its Puritan forms, was in its emphasis on the preached word literally

iconoclastic, image-breaking. When Samuel Moody served as chaplain in 1745 at the seige of the French Catholic fort at Louisburg, he carried an axe with him and called himself "the Sword of the Lord and of Gideon," actually then cutting down the cross and images before preaching from the text, "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving."[14]

Churches like his--those New England white boxes of which Americans are now so fond--were plain for a reason. And within them were only the plainest of objects. A broken and repaired communion plate survives today in Concord from the ministry just preceding Daniel Bliss's. Local tradition has it that this plate was thrown across the meeting house by an enraged parishioner who objected to its high church ("IHS") symbolism.[15] Bliss's own piety is embodied instead in an absolutely plain pewter communion plate, used in Concord during his ministry. (Figure 1.) A full baptismal and communion service in this style are displayed today in the church in Waterford, Maine that was founded by Lincoln and Phebe Ripley, Mary's sister and brother-in-law. A sign declares it the gift of Concord relatives. Up into the early nineteenth century, the Emersons clearly valued that sacramental, iconoclastic plainness.

So we can locate women's spirituality in relation to these holy objects, but not discover its positive content. The

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[14]Margaret Miles, Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), pp. 100-08; Charles C. P. Moody, The Moody Family (Boston: Samuel G. Drake, 1847), p. 78.

[15]Peter Benes, Two Towns: Concord and Wethersfield, A Comparative Exhibition of Regional Culture, 1635-1850, vol. I (Concord: Concord Antiquarian Museum, 1982), p. 259.

devotional practice of communion was a crucial self-affirmation for many women. Recent social historians have shown that well over half of New England church members in full communion were women from the later seventeenth century on.[16] And Puritans valued the sacrament of communion so highly that it was offered only to these full members, all of whom had declared their personal experience of conversion to the congregation or minister. Church membership offered citizenship and identity to women excluded from political citizenship: they were most of all declared full citizens in the coming heavenly or eschatological community, but this coming status was signalled once every month by their privileged, visible presence at the communion table. William Emerson acknowledged the inclusivity of membership and eucharist in a communion sermon of 1776, speaking of the "hidden manna," "angel food" offered by God in communion as "agreeable to every taste, whether old or young, Male or Female."[17]

But the church was in no simple way an open domain for women. In this same church, the same summer as the "hidden manna" sermon, the Covenant was reaffirmed; but only male members raised their hands to affirm it, only men signed it. The female majority stood, but with their hands at their sides and their

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[16]Mary Maples Dunn, "Saints and Sisters," American Quarterly 30 (1978), 583-601; Richard D. Shiels, "The Feminization of American Congregationalism, 1730-1835," American Quarterly 33 (1981), 46-62.

[17]William Emerson, sermon for communion day, June 1776 (Houghton ms.) Cf. Edmund S. Morgan, Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea (New York: New York University Press, 1963); and Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth Century New England (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982.)

names silent on the record.[18] There was a gender-difference of major import between the church as a social structure and the church as an eschatological community, a reflection of the heavenly kingdom. We need to look more closely at women's experience of both, imagine Phebe Bliss and Phebe Emerson both at the communion table and standing without active vote or gesture in the summer of 1776.

Another sort of visual art helps more in that imagining. The Puritans may have smashed icons, but they created a memorial art of their own, the visual representation of individual lives in portrait or gravestone effigy. If God could not be directly imaged, godly people could--including godly women. In a portrait of Phebe Bliss (figure 2), her piety is directly manifest in the book she is holding, in her reading of the word. Also in her chasteness of dress and manner--hair and body nearly covered, no decoration in her clothing. Except for a hint of opulence in the fir trim on her dress: in fact a minister's wife was, by family affiliation, among the highest status members of her community, always called "Madam" by her fellow townsmen.[19] The very act of having a portrait taken embodied this status and claim to special,

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[18]"An Holy Covenant...July 1776" in First Parish Records (ms. Houghton Library); cf. William Emerson, Diaries and Letters, p. 100.

[19]Cf. the 1772 Malden church membership list: male and female members are listed separately, with two deacons heading the male list and "Madam Mary Emerson" the women's. Mary Sr. is at this point the widow of the minister previous to the current minister, Peter Thacher, whose wife is apparently not a member at all. It is unclear whether the current wife or the elder widow would have first rank if both were members. Deloraine P. Corey, The History of Malden, Mass., 1633-1785 (Malden: privately published, 1899), p. 660.

quasi-clerical identity, as did her seat in the meetinghouse, isolated and alongside the pulpit.

In fact the portrait itself embodies her partnership, for it is half of a pair alongside a portrait of Daniel Bliss with his minister's stock and wig and book. "My dear fellow helper in the Lord" is what Daniel called Phebe in a letter written during the Great Awakening.[20] Compare it with the paired gravestones in York of Samuel and Hannah Moody (figure 3), Hannah's beginning "CONSORT of the Rev. Samuel Moody." Likewise, recall Mary Moody Emerson's account of the silver porringer belonging to her Emerson grandparents, engraved with an E over J and M to symbolize their partnership.

Every woman's gravestone that I have seen in this family network starts by naming familial relationship to the clergy. William Emerson's youngest daughter Rebecca never knew her father; he died when she was two months old. Yet her gravestone in Waterford, memorializing a life spent as wife to a merchant and land entrepreneur on the Maine frontier, starts "Rebecca Daughter of Rev. William Emerson." Eminent family, especially New England clerical family, was a major source of identity for women. Although from the other side the clergy did not inevitably memorialize its female partners. The Moodies' pairing of gravestones is repeated for the Emersons in Malden. But in Concord the gravestones of three ministers, Bliss, Emerson, and Ripley, stand near each other in succession, with no mention of

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[20]Quoted in Clifford Shipton, ed., Sibley's Harvard Graduates, IX, 132.

wives whatsoever. Returning to our imagining of Phebe Bliss and Phebe Emerson, minister's wife and predecessor's widow in the summer of 1776, we discover a position of elite status and even leadership, but one that is simultaneously voiceless and easily forgotten even within its own immediate community.

One feminine ideal was pious partnership, but not the only; the status and gentility suggested by Phebe Bliss's fur trim was much more fully embodied in secular portraits. A portrait of Mary Hirst Pepperell, cousin to the elder Mary Moody Emerson, suggests that feminine ideal in eighteenth century New England with its bare torso, ruffles, and demure gesture (figure 4). A diary by Mary's brother Joseph tells of this cousin's stay at their house in York and his absorption in her glamorous sexuality. During this time she is converted and joins the church, Joseph is glad to note in his diary. But he is also worried about her Boston fashionableness, and both of his parents sternly forbid the thoughts of marriage that he and Mary Hirst are entertaining.[21] The same women were often converts and genteel fashionables; their social obligation was to discover the delicate line between appropriate badges of station and inappropriate worldliness.

The Mary Hirst portrait is helpful in understanding a silhouette portrait (figure 5) of the younger Mary Moody Emerson. This is the only portrait of her, and it suggests a genteel young lady nowhere in evidence in her diary. She lived amidst

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[21] Handkerchief Moody: The Diary and the Man, ed. Philip McIntire Woodwell (Portland, Maine: Colonial Offset, 1981), pp. 66, 67, 74, 76, 80-82. See Ulrich on the Mary Hirst [Pepperell] portrait and on gentility, Good Wives, ch. 4.

conventional young ladyhood at least long enough to have this silhouette made--the inexpensive, early nineteenth century version of the Hirst portrait. But about the same time of life she got to know her grandmother Phebe Bliss, and in her own old age sixty five years later held up Phebe's womanhood as exemplary. "She was a woman such as I have read about, but, except her, I have never seen one," Mary told Ellen six decades later. "A perfect Christian." Phebe may have been Daniel's "dear fellow helper," but as Mary idealized her she put piety above partnership. "My Mother," Mary said, "often reproached her with want of feeling because she went to church while her husband lay dead in the house. But she was rapt in another world! She knew nothing of this world....I took care of her in her last sickness. I was over twenty years old. She used to say to me `Cleave to God, Mary, cleave to God.'"[22]

This story, evoking a possible conflict between wifehood and sainthood, leads straight back to Hannah Moody as represented in her epitaph (figure 6). In it "Consort" is only the beginning of an almost staggering tribute to eminence in religion. She is "Consort" on the one hand and "Convert" on the other, "Early and Thorough Convert." And the epitaph spins out from the second term, "Eminent for Holiness, Prayerfulness, Watchfulness, Zeal, Prudence, Sincerity, Humility, Meekness, Patience, Weanedness from the World, Self-denial, Publick-Spiritedness, Diligence, Faithfulness, and Charity." Some of these are social virtues, but they are given eschatological meaning and direction. This is a

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[22]"Stories of our Ancestors," p. 5.

tribute to the identity that after all informed all Puritan piety, membership in the fellowship of heaven, where, recall, "They neither marry nor are given in marriage." The engraved image on this stone is a resurrection image, a skull symbolizing death united paradoxically with wings symbolizing resurrection. This is the early eighteenth century's typical gravestone image; by the time that Samuel Moody died nineteen years after his wife, an angel effigy had replaced the skull. Art historians link this shift to the Great Awakening, and one characterizes the angel effigy as a fully "realized eschatology," an even more dramatic location of the human life in heaven.[23]

In fact a life of good works might be bypassed in the rush for heaven. It is a commonplace that Puritans believed infants damned and in need of repentance and conversion. But a gravestone near the Moody parents in York suggests another emotional reality, the hope that an infant daughter who died the day she was born might enjoy "RESURRECTION," proclaimed in capital letters at the top. "To Immortality in spotless Beauty, with all Other Bodily Perfections, after the fashion of Christ's Glorious Body, is expected for the Sub adjacent dust of Lucy Moodey Who was born, & died, July the 6, 1705. Thus Birth, Spousals to Christ, Death, Coronation All in One Day may have their Celebration."

This is a wonderful if contracted imaging of female holiness as well. Conversion, the dramatic focus of the life plot, was a

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[23]Allan I. Ludwig, Graven Images: New England Stonecarving and its Symbols, 1650-1815 (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1966), p. 45; cf. also James Deetz and Edwin Dethlefsen, "Death's Head, Cherub, Urn and Willow," Natural History Magazine (March 1967), 28-37.

"spousal to Christ" for male and female alike, but with special appropriateness for women and most often in close conjunction in time and role to their earthly marriages.[24] Women were often, both in cultural expectation and in experience, easier, earlier converts than men. Joseph Moody lamented in his diary that though ordained in the church he could not feel the assurance that Mary Hirst had experienced so readily; Joseph Emerson recorded his concern that he was "no more affected with Spiritual Things," adding that his wife had "wak'd in the Night...in a serious and spiritual frame" declaring the certainty and sweetness of "Spiritual Blessings" in her soul. When in 1740 George Whitefield stirred the New England churches, including Concord, Malden, and York, Charles Chauncy accused him of merely moving passions, "especially of the younger People, and the Females among them." But the Moodies, Emersons, and Blisses declared this a moving of the Holy Spirit; and Joseph Moody publicly teased Jonathan Edwards, "They say your wife is going to heaven by a shorter road than yourself."[25]

If the social expectation was that women be converted by a short road, the life reality of seeking conversion was not always easy. The younger Phebe Bliss managed to grow up in a white-hot Awakening family and church without experiencing conversion; only after fourteen months' marriage to William and an unidentified

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[24]See for instance Nancy Cott, "Young Women in the Second Great Awakening in New England," Feminist Studies 3 (1975), 15-29 and Amanda Porterfield, Feminine Spirituality, ch. 1.

[25]Handkerchief Moody, pp. 80, 92, 76; Joseph Emerson, Diary (Houghton ms.), Sept. 30, 1737; Chauncy quoted in Edwin Scott Gaustad, The Great Awakening in New England (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), p. 31; Joseph Moody quoted in The Moody Family. p. 89.

illness of body and spirit did she join the Concord church fully. "Yes my dearest Friend," William writes to her in that year, "I heartily pray that you may enjoy Spiritual Health, that the Father of Mercies and God of all Grace would shower upon you the Blessings of his Spirit and Grace upon you that you may be a Pattern of Patience, Meekness, Humility, and Resignation to the Divine Will." Hannah Emerson, William's eldest sister, apparently never experienced assurance. "She seemed to have very little hope of herself," her grandson wrote of her. "The grand difficulty with her was that she knew nothing of a change of heart in herself," even though "her father supposed that she experienced this great change at a time too early for her recollection in maturer years." I hear in these vignettes a certain pressure by clerical husbands and fathers for women to interpret ambiguous inner life according to the "pattern." But my favorite epitaph for a minister's wife perhaps changes the failure of assurance into a human virtue. On the Waterford gravestone of Phebe Emerson Ripley, William's daughter, is the inscription, "She hath done what she could."[26]

By the end of the eighteenth century, gravestones no longer proclaimed the resurrection of the deceased; perhaps many women, no longer caught up in the Awakening's headiest affirmations of grace, had simply to do what they could. And gravestones focused

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[26]Diaries and Letters, p. 28; Joseph Emerson, "My Ancestors," in Ralph Emerson, The Life of Joseph Emerson (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1834), pp. 447-48; Waterford graveyard. Cf. Barbara Welter's title, "She Hath Done What She Could: Protestant Women's Missionary Careers in Nineteenth Century America," American Quarterly 30 (1978), 624-38.

on the process of mourning by those still living. In a 1797 memorial to grandmother Phebe Bliss (figure 7), the central emblem is an urn and willow, with just a bird in flight as remaining resurrection symbol. Gravestones commonly employed this same symbolism.[27] The written memorial, however, still follows a pattern much like Hannah Moody's gravestone; it calls Phebe the "pious relict" of Daniel and declares her renown for a "love of holiness" which "seemed to possess her whole soul." These tiny emblems, the picture on silk and inscription on paper, are encased in a silk purse and intended for a lady to keep as a private remembrancer--not so far from Phebe Emerson's silk wallet of letters from William. As an artifact, this seems to me wonderfully poised between the eighteenth century Awakening of which Phebe had been part and the nineteenth century Cult of True Womanhood. But I should also note that Ralph Waldo Emerson copied this written epitaph of Phebe Bliss into a journal called "Genealogy" sometime in the late 1820's; the nascent Transcendentalist--no doubt as instructed by Aunt Mary--could also appreciate a woman whose whole soul was possessed by holiness.[28]

Finally, in context of all these others, consider Mary Moody Emerson's own gravestone, designed in 1892, nearly a century after Phebe Bliss's death and thirty years after Mary's, for the Emerson family plot at Sleepy Hollow in Concord (figure 8). The inscription is from the closing lines of Waldo's essay on Aunt Mary and, like his journal passage on Aunt Mary's influence,

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[27]Cf. Deetz and Dethlefsen.
[28]"Genealogy" (ms.), pp. 4-5.

values her life in its effect on him. "She gave high counsels," it says. "It was the privilege of certain boys to have this immeasurably high standard indicated to their childhood...."

But the emblem on this gravestone, a winged sun, tells another story, one of resurrection and eschatological urgency. Ellen Emerson and her brother Edward chose this design, Ellen reveals in a letter, after visiting colonial Concord's Hill Burying Ground seeking models. Ellen was trying to make the entire plot "a precious authority upon the names, dates & relationships of the family for the whole nineteenth century," and for Mary's she wanted "the regulation death's head & cross bones & hour glass, and Memento Mori." She clearly saw Mary as a representative of "the whole nineteenth century" in its lingering, most somber Puritanism. But Edward inclined instead toward "the Egyptian symbol of the sun with wings;" and Ellen conceded to his wish, though noting with some irritation that "he is to have his say in everything."[29]

In this case Edward had seized upon the better idea, for the winged sun was nothing more than a late Victorian, eclectic version of the angel effigy that was--Ellen failed to note--also in abundance on the Hill. It was an emblem associated with those Awakening and Revolution generations that Mary idealized over the merely pious women of her own generation, an emblem of the conversion, assurance, and resurrection that "possessed her whole soul." A few years before Mary's death, Waldo wrote in his journal that her epitaph should be, "Here lies the angel of

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[29]The Letters of Ellen Tucker Emerson, II, 345 and 653.

death:"[30] not just "Memento Mori," that is, but death as an angel conveying visionary, resurrected power. Edward and Ellen finally embodied that power of Mary's in her gravestone emblem if not her epitaph.

The one thing usually known about this woman, told and retold many times, is that in old age she wore a white shroud as her daily garment, wearing out several when death refused to come.[31] If she did--and we know she was wearing a black dress instead when Ellen visited her--but if she did, what was this but a visual sign, not just a sign of seeking death but of seeking resurrection? For life Mary Moody Emerson identified with bereavement and death. She was present at the deathbeds of two grandmothers, her mother, all her siblings, and many nieces and nephews. When Waldo was a child, Mary later remembered, she took Waldo and his father William to the Malden cemetery to see the grave of Joseph; Waldo "skipped about among the graves" that day, but later in life he listened to Aunt Mary's stories of "godly lives and godly deaths."[32]

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[30]Ms. journal "M.M.E. I," no page. Blanche Linden-Ward, author of Silent City upon a Hill: Boston's Mt. Auburn and American Death Ways (forthcoming), has told me that the Egyptian sun-symbol was in use by Boston Brahmin families by the 1830's, especially at Mt. Auburn cemetery; so Ellen and Edward are sorting through the possibilities of many generations' gravestone designs to make a "history" out of their family's plot.

[31]Waldo spoke of the shroud himself in his essay on Mary, CW, X, 400, and subsequent biographers seized on that story almost solely as an account of Mary's character. Van Wyck Brooks called his essay on her "The Cassandra of New England" and began it with the words, "Miss Mary Moody Emerson lived in her shroud." (Scribner's Magazine 59 [1927], 125.) Waldo never made such a claim. But the most wonderful distortion is the headline of an unidentified news-clipping on Brooks's article in the file of the Concord Library: "Mary Emerson, Sister of Poet, Wore Her Shroud Constantly."

[32]"Stories of Our Ancestors," p. 2.

None of this is as bizarre as the Van Wyck Brookses of the world would have it, but an extreme restatement of some important themes in the history of women's religion. "Let me have done with the roads," Mary writes in her diary; "let me share the end of existence." "The first thing I shall ask after drop[p]ing the flesh, if I behold any created being more immediately than my Father, where is the throne?"[33] Perhaps she would have preferred to have, like Lucy Moody, birth and death and spousals contracted into one moment. Mary's wonderfully free sense of heaven reads as a judgment upon the limitations of earth.

III

But now I would like to return from heaven to earth, to the possibilities and limits of the Emerson women as embodied in artifacts rather than emblems, artifacts telling more about the social role of women in a ministerial family. Idealized emblems represent the importance of marriage and family bonds as part of the New England ministry, but they can tell little of actual activity. Houses and household stuff take us further, especially when coupled with wills and estate inventories, diaries and oral tales.

The Old Manse near North Bridge in Concord was built in 1770 by William and Phebe Emerson; it was the birthplace of Mary Moody Emerson, the house to which she returned as a young woman and to which Ralph Waldo Emerson often came visiting his grandmother and

[33]Almanacks, Aug. 3, [1827]; Sept. 10, 1828.

step-grandfather. It is of course a familiar American shrine, but it comes into new perspective when seen alongside two Older Manses. (See figures 9-12.) The Blisses' parsonage in Concord, the house where Mary's mother Phebe grew up, was right on the Mill Dam at the center of town between the cemetery and Court House, perhaps a hundred yards away from the meeting house. Part of this house was a late seventeenth century garrison house during King Philip's War, but Daniel and Phebe Bliss rebuilt it substantially upon buying it in 1738. Joseph and Mary Emerson's parsonage was also on the main street in Malden. It was built for them in 1721 by the parish; unlike the Blisses, they never owned this "ministerial house," so upon Joseph's death in 1767 it went to his successor rather than widow. She moved into a house provided by her merchant son Waldo, but it too was on Main Street, right next to the church, and called the "Madam Emerson house."[34] That house, where young Mary Moody Emerson grew up, is no longer standing; but more surprisingly, all three of the parsonages have survived. Twentieth century New England is a rich museum of domestic architecture, whether in houses publicly memorialized or in many others, surviving as part of still-usable real estate.

A nineteenth century landscape of the Concord river (figure 12) shows the Manse small in the distance behind the obelisk memorializing that famous intrusion on the scene, the battle of Concord. This is a highly romanticized picture, but sets in relief an important aspect of the Manse, its seclusion. Unlike

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[34]For the Block House, see Ruth Wheeler, "Wheeler Houses" Collection, Concord Free Library; for the Madam Emerson house, Corey, 648-49n.

either set of parents, William and Phebe bought land and built their own house a mile's distance from church and center of town. They moved there from the Bliss house, where, Mary told Ellen, "They all lived together [and] made one happy family." "Remember," Mary added, "it was my Mother's fault that the Manse was cut up into so many small rooms. My Father built it just according to her ideas, and she used to say `she was tired of great barns of rooms,' so he had all the rooms made little boxes to please her."[35] In fact the dining room of the Bliss house was that garrison of earlier wartime use and, we can easily conjecture, served as well for many private meetings during the Concord Awakening; even today it is of barn-like size.[36] Phebe did grow up in a large, public house; and I see in her choice of greater distance and smaller rooms a desire for privacy, a move away from the extended family and town to the nuclear family unit.[37]

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[35]"Stories of Our Ancestors," pp. 5-6.

[36]Its current owner, Beth Ferber, generously allowed me to see its large space and thick, fortress-like walls.

[37]Several recent scholars point to a fundamental shift in Anglo-American family structure in the late eighteenth century away from the extended, land-based patriarchal family toward the nuclear unit, with both wives and children moving into more egalitarian relation to the father. See for instance Randolph Trumach, The Rise of the Equalitarian Family: Aristocratic Kinship and Domestic Relations in Eighteenth Century England (New York: Academic Press, 1978); Mary Beth Norton, Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800 (Boston: Little Brown, 1980), esp. pp. 71-109; Carl Degler, At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), esp. pp. 86-110; Jay Fliegalman, Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution against Patriarchal Authority, 1750-1800 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

Yet the Manse was also a large house, its appearance today apparently quite similar to what it was upon building, a rather typical New England salt-box but with a "gambrel roof" accommodating a third story. This for a nuclear family composed of two parents in their twenties, one baby, one black slave, and an indentured servant girl; parents, moreover, who had inherited no land or capital from their parents but only education and a station in life guaranteeing long credit from the local town. It was not then just much a private house but a highly differentiated house, with two parlors in front, a modestly imposing entry hall, the minister's study behind, four bedchambers on the second floor and more sleeping space on the third. (See figures 13 and 14.)

All of this goes a long way, I believe, in evoking the social position of a minister's wife and family. The New England meetinghouse was the town's symbolic center, but it was not consecrated space, just served literally as a place for meeting. And so what sacredness it had could be shared by other spaces. By all houses, really: many church covenants, like William's brother's, included the prayer "that our Houses may be Bethels wherein the morning & evening Sacrifices shall ascend." And the minister's house was symbolic and functional center of this family piety, site of his study, boarding house for visiting ministers, scene of catechetical and prayer meetings. When ministers' associations met, they did so in each others' homes. One of the upper chambers in the Manse was eventually called the "Prophet's Chamber," so many travelling clergy had stayed there. In the 1776

inventory of Phebe and William's goods are listed twenty-five chairs, six full-sized bedsteads, and twenty "cream-colored" English-imported plates--clear evidence of frequent and abundant company.[38]

For women this meant the production of food. Puritan holidays were Fasts or Thanksgivings, economies or abundances of food, and thus part of women's responsibility. The hearth in Phebe's kitchen today (figure 15) is much as it was at the Revolution, or perhaps the 1790's. It is exceptionally large and efficient: the recess to the right holds a copper kettle that could keep many gallons of water hot; the "beehive oven" to the right is also large and deep, suggesting prodigious quantities of everyday and ceremonial baking, perhaps even of communion bread.

Phebe, her mother, and her mother-in-law all had servants, but they were also active household workers; the Manse inventory lists spinning and churning equipment and a variety of stored foods, the tools and products of shared work by mothers and daughters and servants.[39] Mary Moody Emerson recalled to Ellen a

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[38]Ola Winslow, Meetinghouse Hill, 1630-1783 (New York: MacMillan, 1952), p. 50; James P. Welsh, "Holy Time and Sacred Space in Puritan New England," American Quarterly 32 (1980), 79-95; Joseph Emerson's church covenant quoted in David Andrews, The Sure and Only Foundation: A Centennial Discourse...in Pepperell, Mass. (Boston: Well Spring Press, 1847), p. 25; inventory in William Emerson, Diaries and Letters, pp. 127-29. My interpretation of the Manse inventory and furnishings was enabled by the knowledge of staff members there and the insights of Edward Cooke, former Curator of the Concord Antiquarian Museum.

[39]Hambrick-Stowe, pp. 100-104; Leonard I. Sweet, The Minister's Wife: Her Role in Nineteenth-Century American Evangelicalism (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), ch. 1; Ulrich, ch. 4, shows the complementarity of the "pretty gentlewoman" and "good housewife" roles for New England women of elite family.

Family letters refer to the Malden Emersons' black slave Dinah, the Blisses' Phillis, and the Concord Emersons' slave Frank

line that must have often been repeated in her childhood: "Darter," great-grandfather Edward Emerson had said to grandmother Mary, "your puddings is somewhat hard,--but not often." And Mary recalled too the story of Grandmother Phebe Bliss, in her kitchen amidst customary work when she heard of the death by drowning of her twenty-one-year old daughter Hannah. "It was court week in Concord and a great holiday, and they were all in the kitchen together making preparations. My Grandmother Bliss was making the pastry and the others were cooking, when my Father came into the kitchen, walked up to my Grandmother and said `Madam, prepare for heavy tidings.' She took her hands, all flour, out of the pan and knelt right down on the kitchen floor. Then she stood up and said `I am ready.' And he told her that Hannah's lover had tried to ford the Connecticut at the wrong place, and the river was high, and the current had drawn her right out of the chaise and swept her away."[40] Grandmother Bliss's life is defined by both her making of pastry for court week and her devout resignation to the sudden and unexpected event of a daughter's death.

The dining room in the Manse today (figure 16) best evokes the habitual bond of Phebe Bliss and Phebe Emerson as providers of

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and indentured servant Ruth Hunt. Nothing is recoverable about Dinah, nothing of Phillis except that she was married by William Emerson to Caesar, had at least one child, and apparently left Concord (as did Frank) after slaves were emancipated during the Revolution. (Diaries and Letters, 43, 74 and passim; Concord Vital Records.) Ruth Hunt was an orphaned Concord girl of thirteen when she became the Emersons' "apprentice" for five years starting in 1772; no subsequent marriage or death is recorded for her in Concord, so she too probably sought her fortune elsewhere after 1777.

[40]"Stories of our Ancestors," pp. 2, 6-7.

food and hospitality. In fact this actual space was William's study; according to his diary he bought the case clock in the corner in 1767 second-hand for twenty dollars. "Good bargain," he wrote; and indeed it is still running today. But the side chairs and tea tables were Phebe's and her mother's before her, probably kept in the front parlor. These were part of the "household stuff" that her mother divided off to her and she had carried to the new house in 1770.[41] These chairs were in constant use in the Concord parsonage, then, from the late 1730's to the death of Ezra Ripley in 1842. They were present through Awakening and Revolution, Unitarianism and Transcendentalism, never revealing anything ideological or symbolic but mutely, rather elegantly, being sat upon. They are a literal embodiment of "woman's sphere," vitally but silently co-present with some of America's most famous historical occasions.

What one can especially read in them is the gentility and urban aspiration of both the Bliss and Emerson families, evidence to add once again to Phebe Bliss's fur-trimmed plainness. When these chairs were new in the 1730's they were Boston-designed in the finest early Queen Anne style, their "crookt legs" and "horsebone feet" hand-carved by a master craftsman. The minister's wife had her hands in flour and her heart rapt in heaven, but her eye was on the marketplace as well. When Phebe Emerson remarried to Ezra Ripley in the 1780's, wartime inflation was rampant and money scarce, yet Ezra and Phebe bought new, English-imported wallpapers for the parlor and hall of this merely

[41] Diaries and Letters, pp. 37-38, 33, 128.

ten-year-old house, the wallpapers reproduced in these rooms today.[42]

But one final sign of Phebe Emerson's gentility and its origins in the Bliss family is her sampler, embroidered at the age of eight (figure 17.) Recent scholarship on sampler craft suggests that such an elaborate variety of stitches and geometrical bandings could only have been learned at a school, probably one in Boston.[43] Along with the craft itself Phebe would have learned manners and literacy, though literacy devoted to a silent stitching of the alphabet rather than to self-expression. No diary or letter or conversion narrative by this woman survives, nor a portrait nor a grave effigy. But consider the sampler too as a marker of her identity, with its sewn signature under the alphabet, "Phebe Bliss, age 8 years." This was a certificate of genteel accomplishment that a family displayed during their daughter's courtship years. It is Phebe's only self-portrait, and a significant emblem of her, writ large in the Manse as well.

What was the role of women in this extended family? Most obviously, it was within marriage; on the Emersons' genealogical chart (end of paper), Mary Moody Emerson is the sole unmarried

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[42]Benno M. Forman, "Delaware Valley `Crookt Foot' and Slat-Back Chairs," Winterthur Portfolio 15 (1980), p. 41; cf. Karlsen and Crumpacker's sense of Esther Edwards Burr's mixture of home production and purchase of goods in the Introduction to the Journal, pp. 26-27. Richard Nylander of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities has analyzed this wallpaper for the Manse.

[43]Betty Ring, Let Virtue Be a Guide to Thee: Needlework in the Education of Rhode Island Women, 1730-1830 (Providence: Rhode Island Historical Society, 1983).

adult of either gender up to her own generation. Marriage was alliance in a patriarchal network of New Light ministers. Joseph Emerson and Mary Moody married after Joseph taught school in York, serving in effect a ministerial apprenticeship under Samuel Moody; William Emerson and Phebe Bliss married after William succeeded her father in Concord. Naming patterns suggest the importance of these alliances. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century generations recur the names Bulkeley, Waldo, Moody, and Bliss, either as the first names of boys or the middles names of girls. These perpetuate the family names that women over four generations brought into marriage, but the tribute is more to the fathers than to the wives. In 1748 William's eldest brother Joseph travelled to Northampton to visit the Edwards family, found them "the most agreeable family I was ever acquainted with," and sixteen year old Esther Edwards "a very desirable person to whom I purpose by divine leave to make my addresses."[44] If Joseph had succeeded in wooing Esther, there might have been a line of cousins to Mary Moody Emerson with the historically interesting double-barrelled name Edwards Emerson. But Esther protested that she was too young for marriage, and eventually she wrote her diary as the wife of another minister.

The story of Joseph and Esther points to another circumstance, though: that marriage came after voluntary courtship engaged in quite romantically by the young couple themselves. Except for Joseph Moody's desire for fashionable Mary

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[44]Samuel A. Green, ed., Diary Kept by the Rev. Joseph Emerson of Pepperell (Cambridge: John Wilson and Son, 1911), p. 8.

Hirst, children seem to have followed what amounted to parental expectation without open conflict. William rode Phebe out for frequent rides around Concord, called her his "Phebe-bird" in lonely letters while separated, and told how his relatives in Maine were uninterested in seeing him alone, asking "Where's your partner?" as he entered their house. This was a companionate marriage, a partnership in which the wife might be asked for advice or at least support. "Mrs. Emerson," William wrote from the army in Cambridge in 1775, "I'm not a little concerned what I shall do on the approaching Fast. The people will expect something out of the common Course, and I have nothing to entertain them with. What shall I do?"[45] The ideal of minister and wife as "yokefellows" was not merely emblematic.

In particular, a wife was expected to complement her husband, in her private and subordinate position to fulfill all roles that were not his own. I have already suggested one male-female dynamic in this ministerial family: even though the man professionally spoke for God's grace, he suspected that the woman came to it more naturally. But another and contradictory relationship emerges from this evidence too. In a partnership where the man spent his time praying and studying rather than bargaining in the marketplace, his wife became responsible for "seculars." Sarah Edwards may have enjoyed a short road to heaven, but she was praised by her husband's biographer for relieving him of all the "multiplied toils and anxieties" of his earthly life--and this with "becoming deference." Samuel Moody is

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[45]Diaries and Letters, pp. 12, 28, 22, 79.

known in many tales for an extravagant spirituality manifested in unstinting charity and utter reliance on Providence. In all these stories, some eventually written down as told by their daughter Mary, Hannah is the practical partner, angry that Samuel has given away her only pair of shoes, worried where the next meal or load of firewood will come from. The younger Mary Moody Emerson told of Joseph's long hours in the study, then added, "My Grandmother brought up all the children, without disturbing him."[46] There's a woman's epitaph for you. In terms of women's experience, this assignment to "seculars" spelled conflict. The religious culture expected a woman to come early and thoroughly to grace, but never to act upon it with authority or autonomy, instead to worry about firewood and children.

In fact, though, the one area where religious and domestic vocation could come together was in the raising of children. This was a task with theological content and, it is no exaggeration to say, eschatological importance. Whenever Grandmother Emerson found out that another of her thirteen children was coming, says Mary, "she gave thanks that another immortal soul was created." Children of the converted could be baptized in infancy as "halfway" within the covenant, but this placed a large catechetical responsibility on ministers and parents alike to bring those children all the way to membership through conversion. And where the mother had grown up in the ministry, and her husband was off in his study, she perhaps assumed more responsibility for

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[46]Sereno Dwight Edwards, Life of President Edwards (New York: S. Converse, 1829), p. 127; Moody Family, pp. 61-62; "Stories of Our Ancestors," p. 2.

her children's religious instruction than in other eighteenth century families, thus anticipating the later pattern of maternal piety. Joseph and Mary's son Samuel was able to tell his mother at age six what the second birth meant: not being born as baby Ebenezer had just been, but "rising again." "Their mother was everything to them," the younger Mary Moody Emerson said. It was she who prayed with John and Waldo for their vocations, but also she who felt William would do well to prepare for the ministry by cocking hay, not just working at lessons. His father looked out of the window and called, "Billy, Billy, that is a waste of your precious time. Go back to your books!" But his mother said, "No, it does him good to work a little. He has books enough."[47]

I cannot see any change in the course of generations, however, toward wives' greater authority within this particular family. If anything William, saved by his mother from a life of books, grew up to be more authoritarian than his father before him. Even while urging the Concord Minute Men to rise up against the "brawny arm" of British tyranny and bring in the Kingdom of God, he upheld "Family Government" as the private basis of all public order. I have said that, when the Concord church reaffirmed its covenant in 1776, women were silent partners to the agreement. Yet part of the Covenant was a confession of guilt in "not restraining our Children and Servants, from taking those Sinful Liberties that ruin their Morals & subvert all Order and

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[47]"Stories of Our Ancestors," pp. 2-4; Joseph Emerson, "The Remarkables of Samuel Emerson" (ms. Houghton); Edward Hitchcock on John Emerson, quoted in Benjamin Kendall Emerson, The Ipswich Emersons (Boston: D. Clapp, 1900), p. 131.

Government." Whether adult women are to be agents of this Order or subjects is entirely ambiguous in the language and ritual of covenant-making.[48]

But a story by William's daughter Mary tells where the balance fell. "I remember my Father's punishing me once," she said at eighty-six. "I was two years old and when I came into his study I wouldn't make my curtsey...[so] he whipped me. Mother came in and asked why he had punished me. He said `Because she wouldn't make her duty on coming into the room.' `What! Whip a child of two for that!' My Father said `My dear, since you have interfered I must whip her again,' and he did." The age of two, John Demos has said, was the particular moment when according to Puritan child-rearing practice a child's "will" had to be "broken." Mary, who turned two the summer of 1776, was not according to her father the child of a new dispensation; nor could a wife "interfere."[49]

IV

Mary's own childhood, however, was in the hands of women without ministerial husbands. What was "derived to her" of family

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[48]"Oration for the Nineteenth of April, 1776," in Diaries and Letters, p. 95; "An Holy Covenant."

[49]"Stories of Our Ancestors," pp. 7-8. John Demos, A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 134-36; on the breaking of childish wills as the necessary first step toward salvation, see also Philip Greven's sense of the Calvinist (and proto-Revolutionary) temperament in The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-Rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America (New York: Knopf, 1978), part I.

religion came from women who could take what they wanted from the tradition, both male and female, and teach it on their own. Yet in this breakdown of "Family Government" Mary also experienced the powerlessness of women without men in a still-patriarchal society. She did not grow up wanting to be a conventional woman, even a pious one; she hated the domestic role, eschewed sexuality, rejected marriage and dependence. I don't have space here to describe her life in detail, but I do want to relate episodes that will, I hope, suggest her relationship to her wider family.

When Mary met Lafayette in the 1820's she told him that she had been "in arms" at the Concord fight. She meant her mother's arms, of course. Mary was an infant of eight months in April of 1775, and tradition has it that Phebe and her children stood at the upstairs window of the Manse and watched the battle at North Bridge. But the point of Mary's pun is to identify with her father's military arms more than her mother's nurturing arms. Women were really marginal to the militant piety that seized New England churches in the 1770's; a generation earlier they could be Awakening converts as well as their menfolk, but when piety turned political they moved indoors to watch the fighting. One granddaughter recalled long after, "The first news that grandmother had, of what was going on in the morning of the 19th of April, was from the black man, Frank, who rushed into her room with his axe in his hand saying, `The Red Coats have come!' She fainted: she was always delicate."[50]

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[50]Complete Works, X, 374; Diaries and Letters, p. 73.

Phebe represented a model of delicate, subordinate womanhood that her daughter Mary rejected out of hand. Not only because it was irrelevant to more heroic values but because it resulted, as Mary saw it, in her own exile from home. After William's death Phebe, left with five children under the age of eight including a newborn baby, clearly needed the help of her mother and mother-in-law to keep going. Phebe Bliss's slave Phillis, later stories said, rocked the baby Rebecca along with her own child. And two-year-old Mary went to Malden to live with Grandmother Mary and Aunt Ruth. There was nothing unusual in such shared parental responsibility; William's diary just prior to this year of crisis reveals a constant trafficking in women and children between Concord and Malden.[51]

But this arrangement proved permanent, and it had drastic results for Mary. While her mother was remarrying to Ezra Ripley and having her parlor repapered, the Malden family was in crisis. In the spring of 1777 the Malden selectmen brought charges against Grandmother Mary and her daughters for hoarding "sundry Woolens and Linens" needed by the Army in the small shop they were keeping at their house. In fact, with rampant domestic inflation, everyone was hoarding everything they could; but the status of Madam Emerson the minister's widow had slipped far enough that she could become a target of community hostility.[52]

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[51] Diaries and Letters, pp. 74, 59-71 passim.

[52] Corey, pp. 648n., 769-70n. In Concord, by contrast, the only person found guilty of hoarding was a newcomer to town, an outsider. (Robert Gross, The Minutemen and their World (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), pp. 143-44.

And the worst was yet to come. Late in 1778 smallpox broke out in Malden; eventually eight people died, including the elder Mary Moody Emerson and her daughter Rebecca's husband. And, says the town historian as though it were a simple matter of record, the smallpox was "brought" by Rebecca. How such blame could be affixed is not clear, since smallpox was everywhere in the Boston area. Again, Rebecca seems to have become a scapegoat. Perhaps she was already a socially marginal person, or perhaps she became such as a result of this experience. At any rate it is clear that from the early 1780's on she was increasingly insane, legally incapable of administering her husband's estate and dependent on her sister Ruth.[53]

As a child Mary Moody Emerson lived in the midst of all these disturbing events; probably one reason that Phebe and Ezra never brought her back to Concord was that childless and now servantless Aunt Ruth needed her for both companionship and household service. "There was plenty of work for the little niece to do day by day, and not always enough bread in the house," her nephew Waldo recounted. "One of her tasks, it appears, was to watch for the approach of the deputy sheriff, who might come to confiscate the spoons or arrest the uncle for debt."[54]

Silver spoons and debt, sometimes a lack of bread: these were realities of the genteel poverty faced by women of clerical family without clerical income. The spoons that earlier had declared status and served quests were also specie in those late

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[53]Corey, p. 779; appendices to will of Rebecca's husband Jacob Parker, Middlesex Probate Records.

[54]Complete Works, X, 374.

days of the Revolution: both debtors and debt-collectors wanted them. Grandmother Mary's will, drawn up in 1777 just after the cloth episode, makes clear that silver and luxury goods were still part of the household world that Mary grew up in. Grandmother Mary had enough silk and velvet gowns and silver buckles to divide up among numerous daughters and granddaughters, with a double portion to her namesake Mary.[55] What the will could not provide was any way to sustain the style of life that such goods suggested. In other circumstances they might have helped bring an elite marriage; now they could either be sold for debt or kept for pride.

Mary grew up with remarkably disempowered models of her own sex around her; and she was deeply angry for life about the people and circumstances surrounding such a childhood. "Hail happy day," she wrote in 1826 on the fiftieth anniversary of national independence; "tho' the revolution gave me to slavery of poverty & ignorance & long orphanship,--yet it gave my fellow men liberty."[56]

Yet she found a major--an absolute--resource in the religious culture of her childhood, still in close touch with the First Great Awakening; and when it came to the eschatological power of grace, as opposed to social order, she found no hindrance in her female sex. "My early remembrance at 5 respecting trouble," she wrote in her diary, "continued till at 17 I entered refined society at Newburyport. After that I was obliged to go to Concord

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[55]Mary Moody Emerson, Will (Middlesex Probate Records.)
[56]Almanacks, July 4, 1826.

& learn duties which tried me." Mary was five when her grandmother died, seventeen when she joined her newly married sister Hannah in Newburyport, and a bit older when she finally returned to be tried by new duties in her mother's house in Concord. But the point of this autobiographical passage is her response to "Trouble," and that is faith in the power of heaven. "The first sermon I heard with attention, probably," she goes on, "was to prove the divine goodness. It surprised and pained. [I knew] the impossibility of the reverse. This `theodicy' depresses. The knowledge of children in mines & all the modes of slavery & suffering in history (which I avoid) brings up a mystery, a `cloud,' but I never doubted the perfection of perfect benevolence and justice. I knew that righteousness `was the habitation of his existence.'" How did she know this? Clearly from Grandmother Mary and Aunt Ruth, Ruth who, Mary wrote elsewhere, "early taught me that Providence and Prayer were all in all."[57]

Rather than be a spinster in hard times, Ruth married late to that man who was always in debt. Mary grew up seeing the fault in such logic and vowed to remain single. "I walked to Captain Dexter's," she recorded in her diary of 1807, "--sick--promised never to put that ring on." And, a few weeks later, "Henceforth the picture I'll image shall be girded loins, a bright lamp, fervent devotion. My condition in life is singular, & presses me on the throne of my Master with peculiar strength." Unlike her female ancestors, she would await spousal to the heavenly

[57]Almanacks, July 7, 1855; Complete Works, X, 387.

bridegroom. Marriage, she wrote to her friend and would-be sister-in-law Sarah Bradford, "seems to end all other deeds, shackles accidents and bolts up change." Eventually she would teach her nephews the virtues of "singular" life, solitude; much more drastically than Waldo, however, she had experienced the opposite, society, as dependence and grief. "I shall be my own woman without `man or boy,'" she wrote to his brother Charles.[58]

Even though insisting on her own right to religious solitude within the family, however, she absorbed and reflected on the whole inter-generational experience that went before her, focusing her attention on both its tragedies and its moments of highest glory. Her anecdotes and meditations concerned both male and female ancestors, both their worldly goods and their spiritual visions. The Concord Manse, she wrote soon after her mother's death, seemed always to be "mourning after its first inmates." And a few years later she meditated on that house's long history as inspired by the nighttime wind and the study clock. The clock was a mere "time-server," she wrote, "forever tuned to the present,...blabbing the same hour that thou didst when liberty first fired on thy countrymen." Yet it had been "wittness to the grief which forever prostrated the widows....And now thou art as obedient to the relentless hand of female order as when her

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[58]Almanacks, Jan. 30 and [February?] 23, 1807; Mary to Sarah Alden Bradford Ripley, May 22, 1818; Mary to Charles, May, 1831 (letter transcripts courtesy of Nancy Simmons, currently editing all of Mary's letters.) Cf. Lee Chambers-Schiller's interpretation of some of these lines of Mary's in Liberty, A Better Husband: Single Women in America: The Generations of 1780-1840 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), pp. 57-58.

namesake wound thee up."[59] The clock was to Mary both an unresponsive witness to history and a symbol of the feminine domestic order that underlay it.

But she recorded the memory that best brings together domestic settling, female ancestry, and vision of heaven in her diary on a Sabbath morning in 1841. "How well," she wrote, "this humming fly brings back emotions of a certain Sabbath morning, when I was perhaps 4 years old and every chair & old bit of furniture on which the sun glanced thro' a small eastern window. That consciousness of sober rich tranquillity has never been lost to memory, & returns when the contented vagrant serenades my lonely chamber." She said in the other autobiographical passage that her early memory was "Trouble." Here however is "tranquillity" as well, and as the passage moves along it is tranquillity specifically linked to the memory of her grandmother Mary. "....I already see the cold beams of the sun glowing thro the leafless arms of the trees on my grandmother's portrait--and feel the still nameless tone of feeling which will unite the infinite to the finite--tho' no chain of dialectics will be the medium."[60]

This is a Sabbath scene, both immediately and retrospectively: holy but not churchly, interior and private, disestablished in a way that makes room for the female imagination. Most interestingly, Grandmother Mary is both present and absent in it; the sun shines coldly through leafless trees

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[59]Mary to Sarah Alden Bradford Ripley, [1825]; Mary to Charles (Jan. 22, [1831].

[60]Almanacks, June [27, 1841.]

onto her portrait, official memorial to her life. Mary seems to be recalling an experience of love and tranquillity in early childhood but cannot attach an actual face to it, only the face of the portrait that survived death. And so it evokes a "nameless tone of feeling," combining pleasure with loss and grief. But in the very ambiguity of that nameless tone also lies its power in Mary's memory, because this feeling "unites the infinite to the finite," restores a mourning child to a heavenly grandmother. Mary Moody Emerson experienced mourning early and deeply; her power, though, was to find a way to heaven that restored to her finite self the whole family that she had lost.

THE EMERSON FAMILY AS A MINISTERIAL DYNASTY

3 previous generations of Emersons in Massachusetts: one minister, one deacon. Inter-married with Bulkeley (two ministers) and Waldo (various deacons.) Rev. Peter Bulkeley founder of Concord and important prosecutor of Anne Hutchinson.

Samuel's maternal grandmother Mary Perkins Bradbury convicted of witchcraft; Hannah's uncle Samuel Sewall diarist, magistrate, prosecutor of witches.

(17TH CENTURY)

REV. SAMUEL MOODY 1676-1747 (YORK) = HANNAH SEWALL 1677-1728

2 siblings, Rev. Joseph and Lucy

(FIRST GREAT AWAKENING)

REV. JOSEPH 1700-67 (MALDEN) = MARY MOODY 1702-79

REV. DANIEL BLISS 1715-64 (CONCORD) = PHEBE WALKER 1713-97

HANNAH 1722-1812 = REV. DANIEL EMERSON (father's cousin)

REV. JOSEPH 1724-75

MARY 1726-58 = REV. DANIEL LITTLE (grandfather's student)

6 other children: Edward, Samuel, Bulkeley, Waldo, Waldo, Ebenezer

REBECCA 1738-1816

RUTH 1741-1808

REV. WILLIAM 1743-76 = (1) PHEBE BLISS 1741-1825 = (2) REV. EZRA RIPLEY 1751-1841

REV. JOHN 1745-1826

8 siblings

(REVOLUTION)

JOHN HASKINS 1729-1814 = HANNAH UPHAM 1734-1819

REV. WILLIAM 1769-1811 = RUTH HASKINS 1768-1853

HANNAH BLISS 1770-1807

PHEBE BLISS 1772-1807 = REV. LINCOLN RIPLEY (step-father's brother)

MARY MOODY 1774-1863

REBECCA 1776-1845

15 siblings

SARAH 1781-1826

REV. SAMUEL 1783-1847

DANIEL 1784-1825

CHARLES JACKSON 1770-1818 = LUCY COTTON 1768-1818

(SECOND GREAT AWAKENING, UNITARIAN CONTROVERSY)

PHEBE RIPLEY 1798-1800

JOHN CLARKE 1799-1807

WILLIAM 1801-68

REV. RALPH WALDO 1803-82 = (1) ELLEN TUCKER 1811-31 = (2) LYDIA JACKSON 1802-92

EDWARD BLISS 1805-34

ROBERT BULKELEY 1807-59

CHARLES CHAUNCY 1808-36

MARY CAROLINE 1811-14

3 siblings

(TRANSCENDENTALISM)

WALDO 1836-42

ELLEN TUCKER 1839-1909

EDITH 1841- 1929

EDWARD WALDO 1844-1928

(GILDED AGE)

Compiled by Phyllis Cole

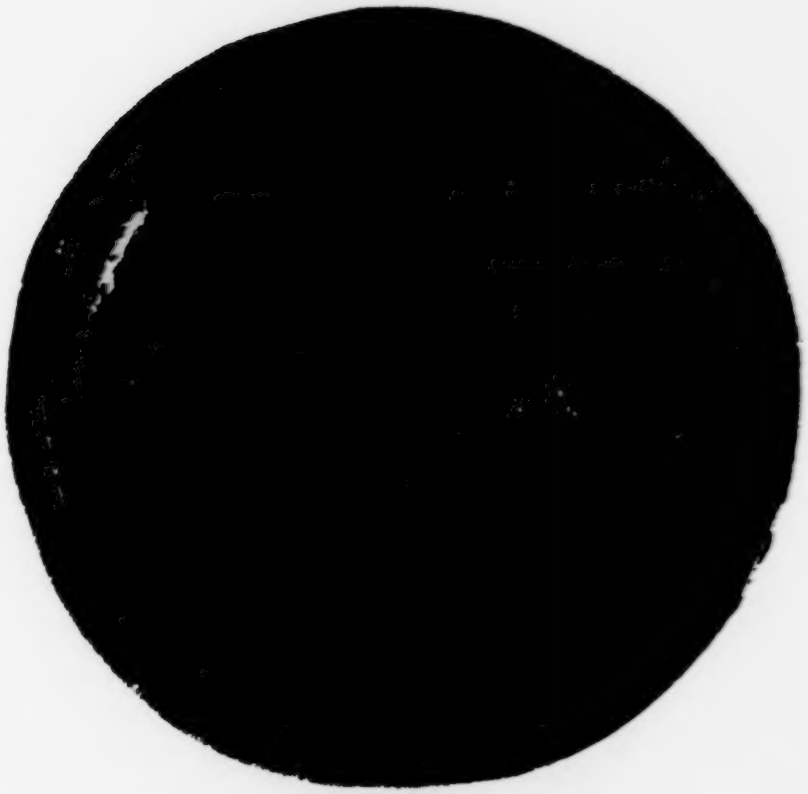


FIG. 1. TWO EIGHTEENTH CENTURY COMMUNION PLATES, CONCORD.

FIG. 2. ANONYMOUS PORTRAITS OF REV. DANIEL BLISS AND MRS. PHEBE WALKER BLISS, GRANDPARENTS OF M. M. E.

FIG. 3. PAIRED GRAVESTONES OF REV. SAMUEL MOODY AND MRS. HANNAH SEWALL MOODY, GREAT-GRANDPARENTS OF M.M.E.

FIG. 4. PORTRAIT OF MARY HIRST PEPPERRELL, ATTRIBUTED TO JOHN SMIBERT, 1733.

FIG. 5. SILOUHETTE OF MARY MOODY EMERSON, CA. 1800.

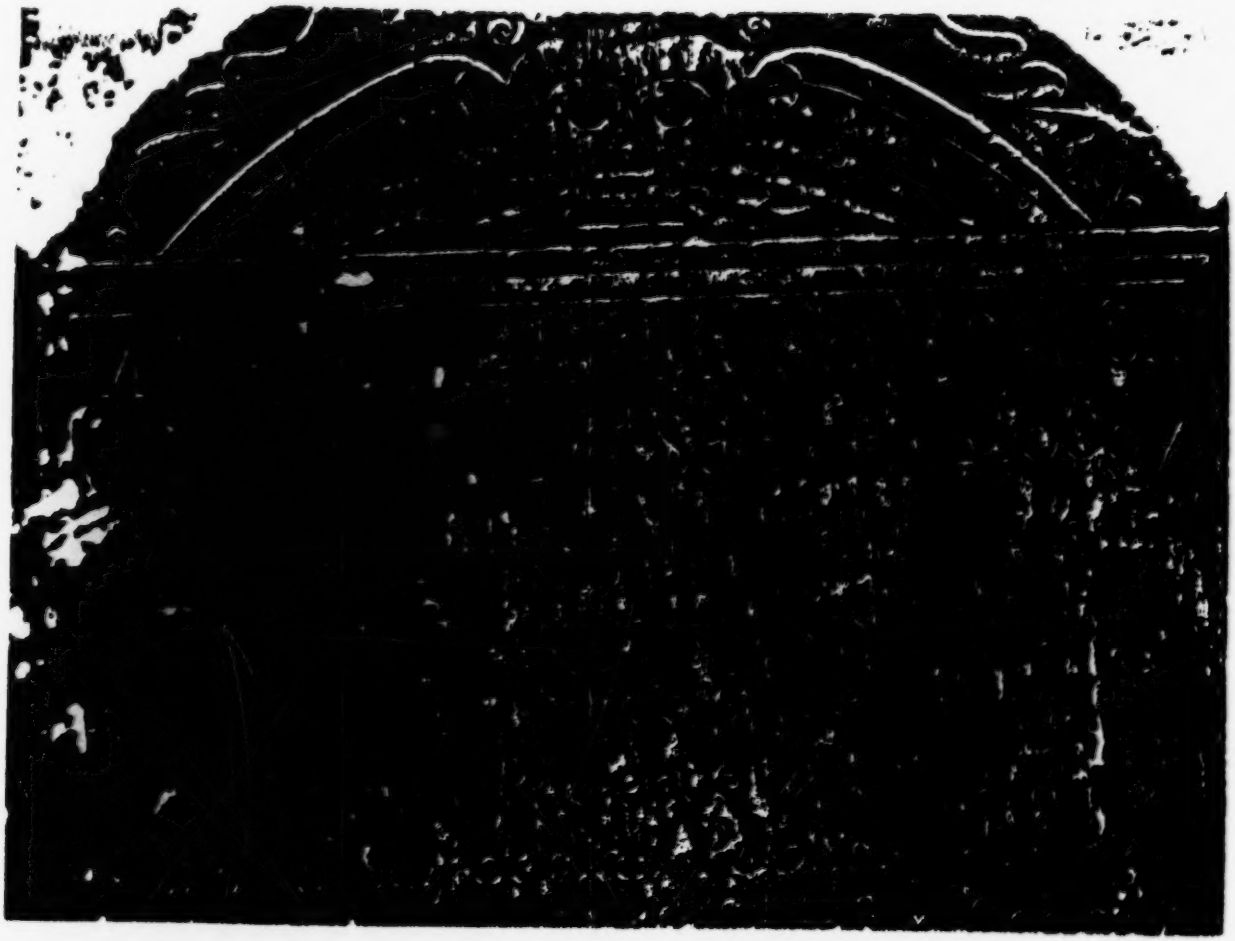
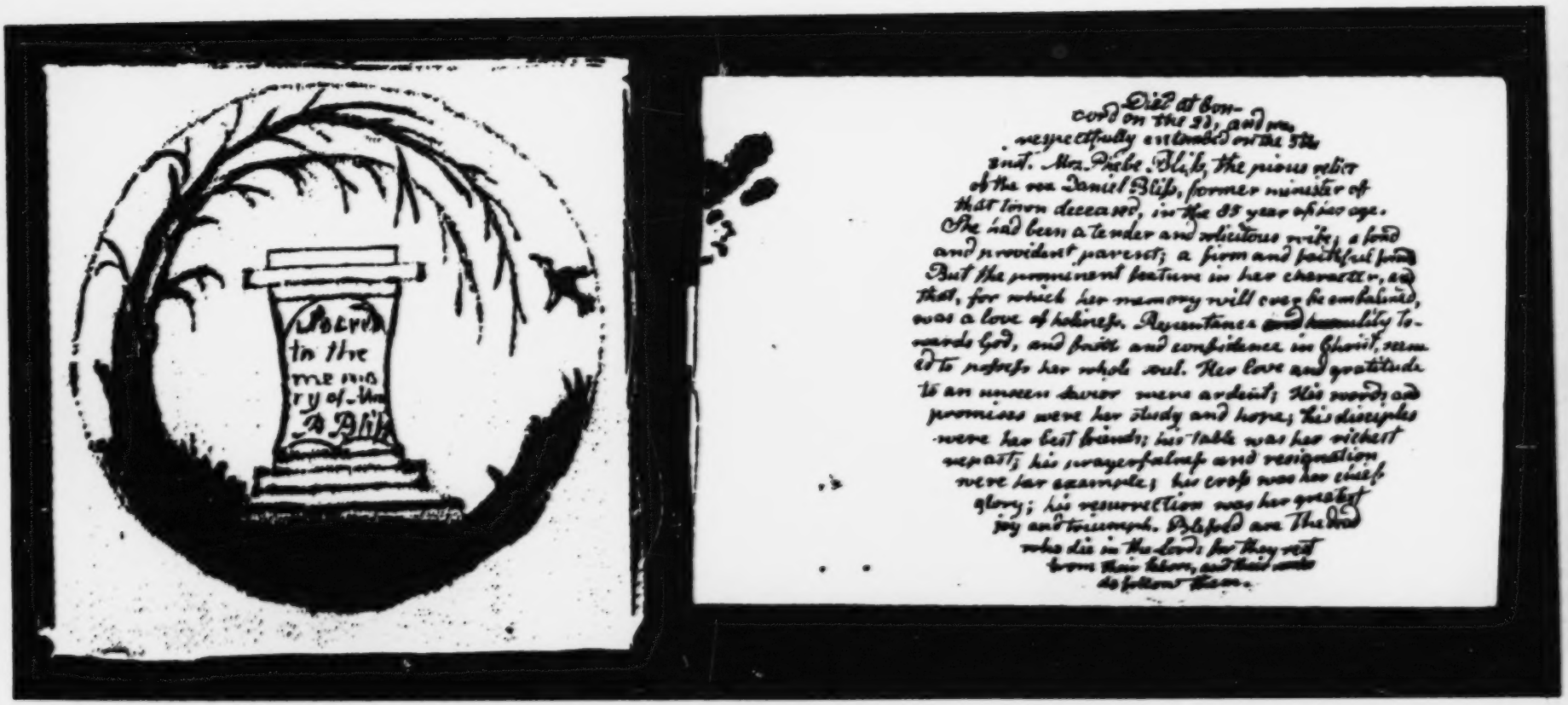


FIG. 6. EMBLEM AND EPITAPH, GRAVESTONE OF HANNAH SEWALL MOODY.



Died at Bos-
ton on the 22, and re-
spectfully entombed on the 25th
inst. Mrs. Phebe Bliss, the pious relict
of the rev Daniel Bliss, former minister of
that town deceased, in the 85 year of her age.
She had been a tender and solicitous wife, a fond
and provident parent; a firm and faithful friend.
But the prominent feature in her character, and
that, for which her memory will ever be embalmed,
was a love of holiness. Repentance and humility to-
wards God, and faith and confidence in Christ, seem-
ed to possess her whole soul. Her love and gratitude
to an unseen savior were ardent; his words and
promises were her study and hope; his disciples
were her best friends; his table was her oftenest
repast; his prayerfulness and resignation
were her examples; his cross was her chief
glory; his resurrection was her greatest
joy and triumph. Blessed are the dead
who die in the Lord; for they rest
from their labors, and their works
do follow them.

FIG. 7. ENLARGEMENT OF MEMORIAL TO PHEBE WALKER BLISS, 1797.

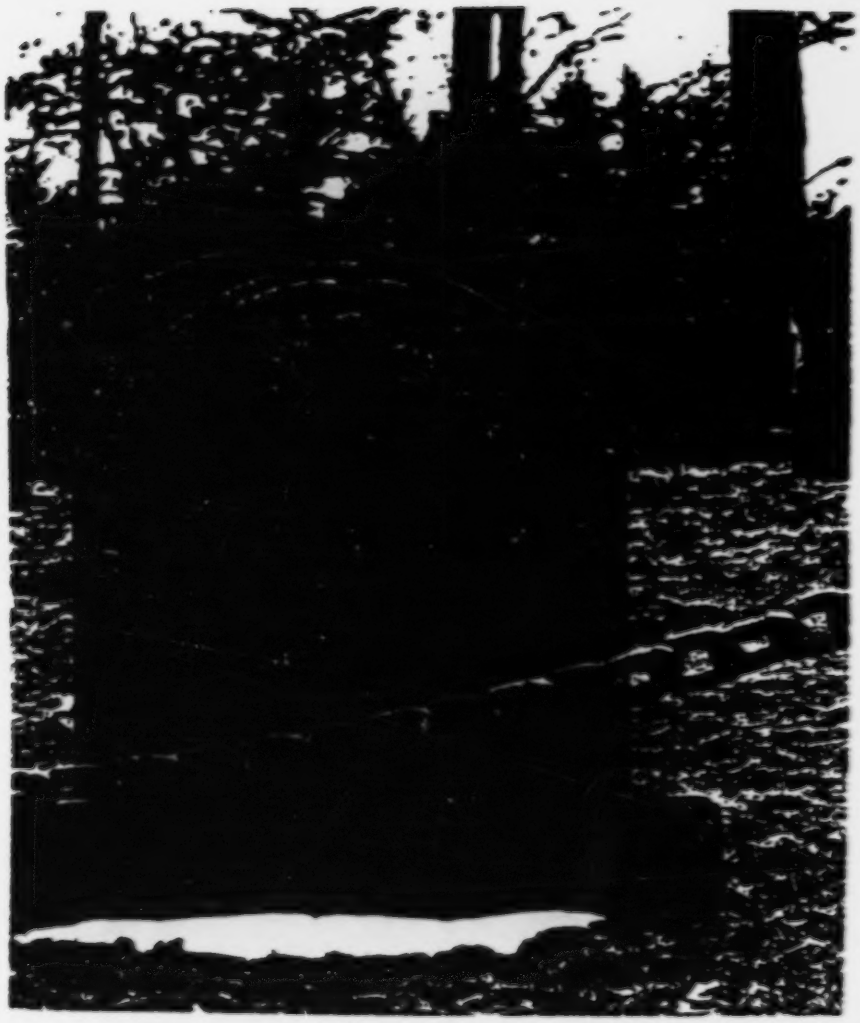


FIG. 8. GRAVESTONE OF MARY MOODY EMERSON, CA. 1863.

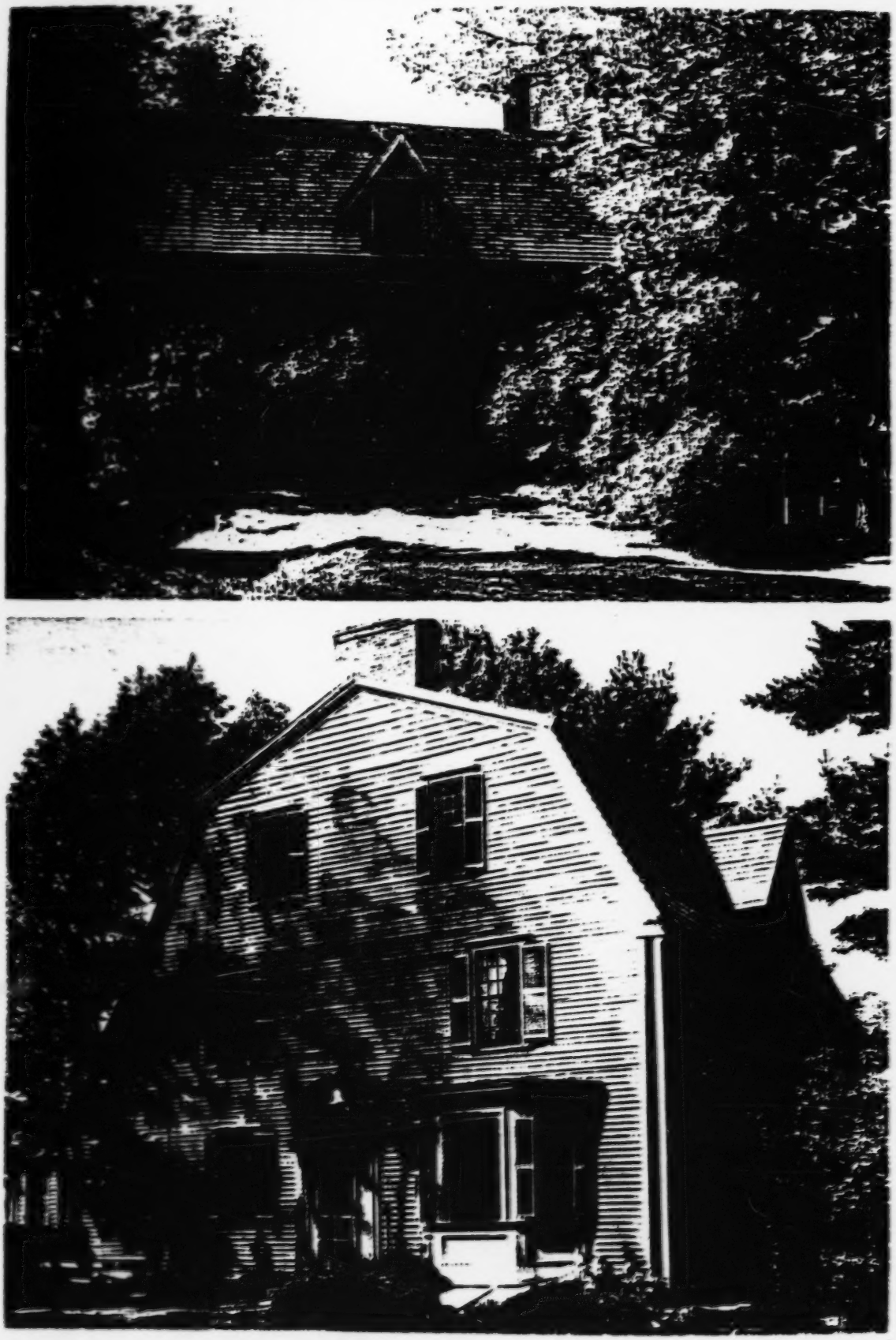


FIG. 9. FRONT AND SIDE VIEWS OF THE "OLD MANSE."

FIG. 10. "BLOCK HOUSE" OF DANIEL & PHEBE BLISS, ALONGSIDE SOUTH BURYING GROUND ON CONCORD MILL-DAM.

FIG. 11. MALDEN MINISTRY HOUSE, BUILT FOR JOSEPH AND MARY MOODY EMERSON.

FIG. 12. "VIEW OF THE BATTLEGROUND," ARTIST UNKNOWN CA. 1850, SHOWING THE MANSE IN ITS SYLVAN LANDSCAPE.

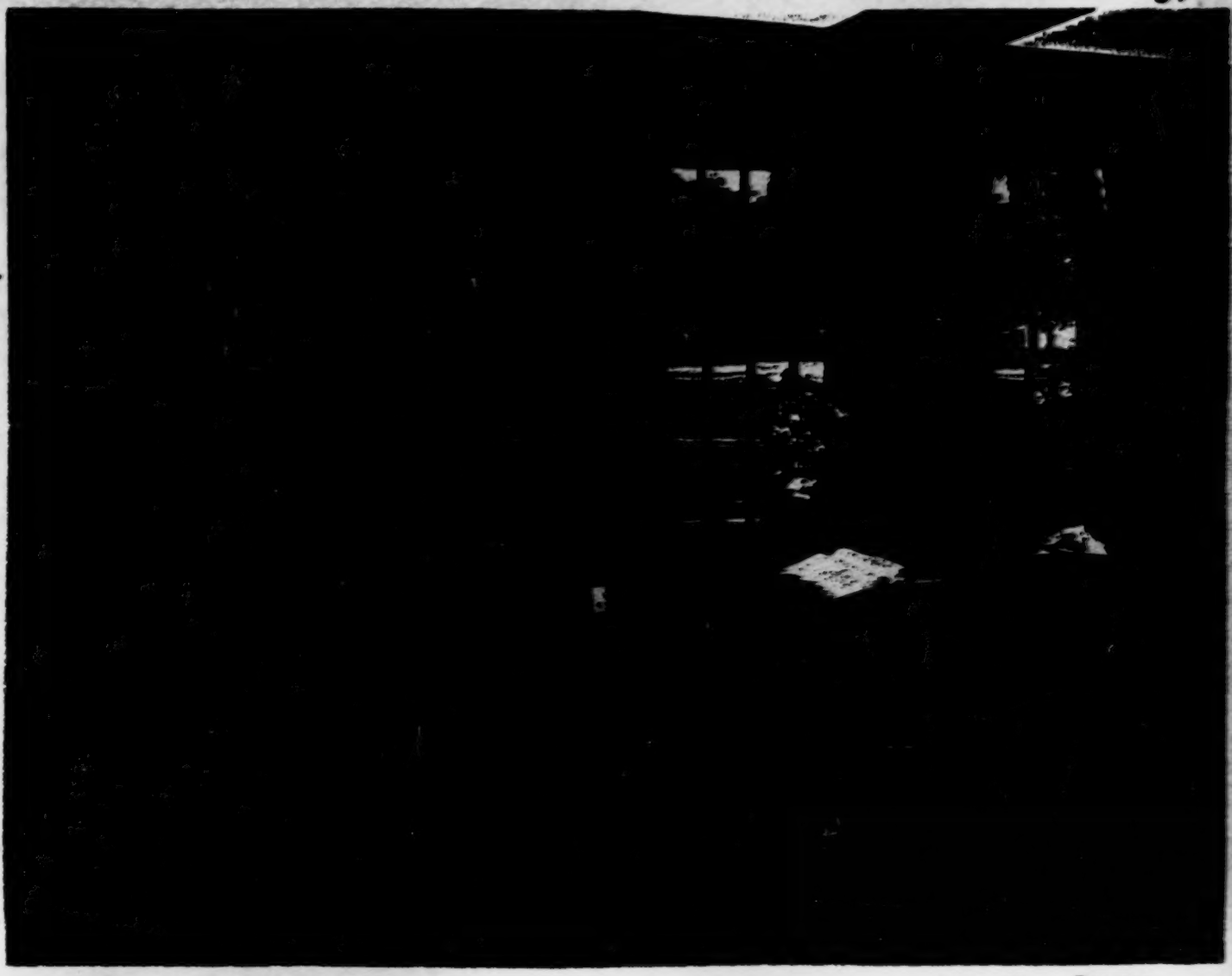


FIG. 13. SOUTH (FAMILY) PARLOR OF MANSE WITH REPRODUCTION OF 1780 WALLPAPER.

FIG. 14. HALL OF MANSE WITH REPRODUCTION OF 1780 WALLPAPER AND PORTRAIT OF MME'S HALF-BROTHER DANIEL BLISS RIPLEY.

FIG. 15. MANSE KITCHEN WITH HEARTH OF PHEBE BLISS EMERSON RIPLEY, MME'S MOTHER.

FIG. 16. DINING ROOM WITH "CROOKT FOOT" SIDE CHAIRS, C. 1735.

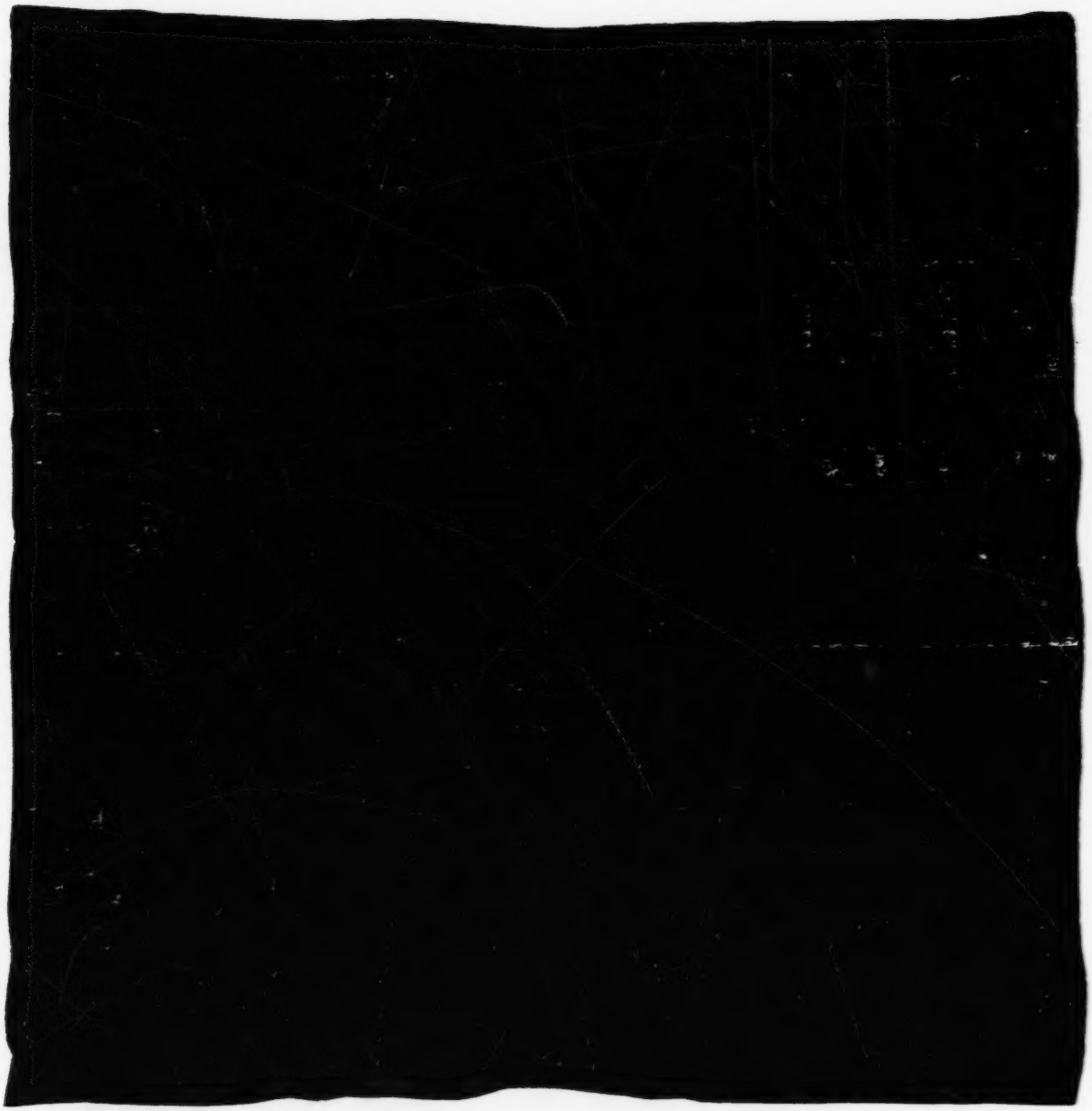


FIG. 17. SAMPLER OF PHEBE BLISS EMERSON RIPLEY, "AGE 8 YEARS," 1749.

SOURCES OF ILLUSTRATIONS:

1. Peter Benes, Two Towns: Concord and Wethersfield, A Comparative Exhibition of Regional Culture, 1635-1850, I (Concord: Concord Antiquarian Museum, 1982), p. 132.

2. Benes, pp. 16-17.

3. Photo by Laurie Ledeen.

4. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), following p. 108.

5. Concord Free Library Archives.

6. Photo by Laurie Ledeen.

7. Emerson Family Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

8. Photo by Ethan Thomas, Harvard Divinity Bulletin.

9. A Visitor's Guide to Historic Concord (Concord, Concord Antiquarian Museum), p. 8; reprint from Colonial Homes Magazine, July/August 1983.

10. Ruth R. Wheeler, Concord: Climate for Freedom (Concord: Concord Antiquarian Society, 1967), p. 95.

11. Malden Public Library Archives.

12. Benes, p. 10.

13-16. Visitor's Guide, pp. 9-11.

17. Benes, p. 86.

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